

Rockville Commission on the Environment
Issue Analysis for Mayor and Council:
Montrose Parkway
October 3, 2005

Recommendation: *The Environment Commission recommends that the Mayor and Council withdraw their support for the planned Montrose Parkway and not transfer two parcels of right-of-way to the County for this project at this time until it can be determined that:*

- *Sufficient identification of alternative traffic demand reduction strategies have been examined and properly deployed*
- *Approaches to avoiding or minimizing wetland and forest destruction have been examined and implemented in accordance to Rockville's own development guidelines.*

Background: The County Council has voted to build the planned Montrose Parkway. The planned Montrose Parkway would connect I-270 to Veirs Mill road, in three segments. Segment One would go from 270 to E. Jefferson Drive at a current cost of \$68 million. The Parkway paired with I-270 would bring more people from the northwest section of the county to the area around White Flint. The plan would require the taking of portions of several Rockville residents' yards, which the County plans to acquire by eminent domain. There currently are a number of administrative and legal challenges to the planned Montrose Parkway.

Analysis:

Environmental Concerns:

The Parkway will destroy a significant wetland and a mature forest. While these areas fall outside of City limits, destruction of this natural habitat enjoyed by residents of Rockville and others should be avoided. The importance of wetlands to our aquifers, stormwater management to prevent flooding, and quality of life cannot be overlooked. And, although the Army Corps of Engineers has approved the project, the project would not have been approved under Rockville's more restrictive environmental development guidelines, since they require a greater buffer zone around streams than planned. Rockville should consistently apply its well-founded development criteria in deciding whether to approve a project, even to those adjacent to Rockville boundaries when they affect the City's own SWM issues and affect the quality of life of its citizens.

Road Congestion:

Supporters of the planned Parkway claim it could alleviate traffic congestion in North Bethesda. But the County's analysis only supports the claim that the Parkway would reduce traffic on a portion of Montrose Road. It would increase traffic on the other end of Montrose Road and would increase traffic on I-270 and Rockville Pike as well.

The company that conducted the traffic analysis in favor of the Parkway is the same company

that holds the contract to do the engineering for the Parkway. Its objectivity is questionable. While the current Parkway study has been ongoing since 1996, the scope of the study has been limited. The study failed to consider an alternative that would combine transit improvement and travel demand management. Nor did the study consider the impact of the Parkway on Rockville Pike or I-270 traffic. Traffic analysts know that while a new road will reduce traffic on nearby parallel roads, it increases traffic on roads with which it intersects.

If the Parkway were to work as planned, it would reduce travel times from the upcounty area to south Rockville/North Bethesda. But the planned Parkway may not be efficacious. If the planned Parkway is to bring additional people from northwest Montgomery County, it will require additional capacity on I-270, which is not planned. If I-270 becomes congested prior to the exit for Montrose Road, then the planned Parkway likely will not make commutes faster. Conversely, even if I-270 had sufficient capacity and could bring in substantially more cars, traffic would get substantially worse on an already overburdened Rockville Pike, and other adjoining streets.

One alternative would be a Transit/Travel Demand Management to better meet both our transportation and environmental needs. The south Rockville/North Bethesda area is well suited to such an approach. There are thousands of office jobs in the area around White Flint Metro station and Executive Boulevard. The Metrorail Red Line from Shady Grove to White Flint operates at perhaps half capacity since only every other train continues beyond Grosvenor during rush hour. Fifty bus routes feed into the Red Line to the north of White Flint. A combination of enhanced service on the Red Line and these bus routes is one alternative to the Montrose Parkway.

Neither the County nor its engineering firm considered such a Transit/TDM alternative. They did, however, project traffic patterns in 2010 if they did *not* build the Parkway but implemented the travel demand management called for in the area Master Plan. They found that traffic would be *no* worse in 2010 than it had been in 1995, demonstrating the potential for such an approach.

The County has moved forward with this project; however, the Mayor and Council should give additional reconsideration to the City's role in facilitating this project through its transfer of property. At this time of high energy prices, stepping back from the current approach to re-examine alternative traffic demand strategies and policies that could both reduce the traffic burden as well as avoid significant environmental/energy cost to the City and its citizens is recommended by the Environment Commission.